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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CARACAS 001637

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SCUL](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: IV PARTICIPANTS AND USAID PARTNERS OUTED, AGAIN

REF: A. CARACAS 01033

[1](#)B. CARACAS 01432

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Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT R. DOWNES
FOR REASON 1.4 (D)

[1](#)1. (C) During a presentation before the National Assembly (NA) August 1, Amcit Eva Golinger and Mario Silva, host of the stridently Chavista television show "La Hojilla," accused 33 former International Visitors (IV) Program participants and several USAID partners of working on behalf of the USG to "destabilize" President Chavez' "Bolivarian Revolution." The Committee's decision to investigate the journalists produced significant public backlash and was compared to the tactics of the McCarthy era, including criticism from within Chavista circles. Several of the affected journalists dismissed the accusations and questioned the legality of a possible investigation. Due to the public outcry surrounding the presentation, the Committee has since denied any intention to summon the 33 journalists. Golinger's campaign largely failed, although prospective IV participants are increasingly concerned over possible retaliation by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. End Summary.

The Golinger List

[1](#)2. (C) During a televised presentation before the National Assembly's (NA) Media Committee August 1, Eva Golinger, an Amcit lawyer and ardent Chavista, and Mario Silva, host of the BRV-affiliated television show "La Hojilla," accused 33 former International Visitors (IV) Program participants and invitees, mostly opposition-oriented journalists, of serving as "destabilizing agents" of the USG. Golinger alleged IV participants worked directly and indirectly with U.S. intelligence agencies to "debilitate and topple" President Chavez' "revolutionary" government. Armed with a hand-drawn, multi-colored flow-chart on cheap poster board, Golinger argued that the USG, through its exchange programs, attempted to infiltrate Venezuelan media outlets by influencing the editorial tendencies of journalists in order to promote USG interests.

[1](#)3. (C) Golinger and Silva called on the Committee to investigate the nature of the exchange programs, the activities of the outed participants, and their funding sources. As she has done on previous occasions, Golinger presented "declassified" documents she acquired through a

FOIA request regarding the IV program, which included the names of former program participants and invitees, program itineraries, and the costs associated with the visits (ref. A).

14. (C) Golinger also accused several USAID partner NGOs of receiving funding and training from the USG in order to "destabilize" the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (BRV). Golinger named 15 NED-sponsored organizations, noted that USAID has funded over 300 programs in Venezuela, and accused OTI of fomenting anti-Chavez conspiracies in Venezuela.

15. (C) Following the presentation, the Committee ruled that the 33 journalists would be summoned for formal questioning. The legislative body expressed particular interest in three journalists and requested they testify August 8, regarding their participation in the exchange programs entitled "The Role of the Media in a Democratic Society" and/or "Investigative Journalism" as well as their connections with the USG. Manuel Villalba, president of the Committee, justified the decision, saying "journalism should not be used as a tool to bring down the (BRV) Government."

Public Backlash

16. (C) The accused journalists dismissed Golinger's "findings" and responded harshly to the Committee's decision to summon them. They issued an August 8 communique to NA deputies demanding to know the status of their hearing. They noted that none of the journalists in question had been formally called to testify before the NA, and argued that the Committee did not have the legal authority to launch an investigation. Fifteen of the named journalists followed up August 13 asking that the NA allow them to formally present their case.

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17. (C) In the days following the presentation, the affected journalists and sympathizers mounted an impressive media rebuttal. The local independent print, television, and internet media were inundated with articles expressing support for the 33 journalists and criticizing Golinger for her lack of familiarity with the IV program. While some former IV participants and invitees commented on their positive experiences with the exchange programs, others questioned why Chavista IV participants had conveniently been left off of Golinger's list.

18. (C) Interestingly, some of the strongest criticism against Golinger's allegations came from within the Chavista camp. First Vice President of the NA Desiree Santos Amaral weighed in August 3, saying she considered it excessive and unnecessary to expose beneficiaries of USG programs to public scrutiny when there is no (immediate) indication they broke the law. Santos was quick to point out, however, that she "did not doubt the Department's desire to buy the minds," of journalists. Nevertheless, she called on the Committee to dismiss its proceedings against those outed by Golinger. Similarly, Daniel Hernandez, a member of the Committee, expressed doubt that participation in an exchange program amounted to a crime under Venezuelan law. (Note: Hernandez, a former IV grantee, declined to participate in an exchange program. He said Embassy personnel did not pressure him to participate and treated him with respect. End Note.)

9.(C) Separately, during his weekly Sunday television show August 12, former Vice President Jose Vicente Rangel praised Santos for her dissension and referred to the Committee's actions as "unacceptable." Rangel insisted that Golinger's allegations played into the hands of the "empire" and as a result dismissed her agenda as McCarthy-like. (Note: We are almost certain that Rangel is a former IV participant, but Post's records do not go back far enough to confirm this

widely-rumored belief. End Note.)

¶10. (C) As a result of the public outcry surrounding the presentation, the Committee has attempted to sweep this issue under the rug. The three "special interest" journalists were never summoned on August 8 and the Committee has since denied it ever intended to begin an investigation. To date, the affected journalists have not jointly pursued a legal case against Golinger or Silva. Roger Santodomingo, however, one of the three journalists scheduled to be summoned August 8 and former editor of the on-line news forum "Noticiero Digital," is pursuing legal action against Silva for defamation of character stemming from comments Silva made on "La Hojilla" (Ref. B).

Golinger on the Defensive

¶11. (C) In an apparent effort to pressure Chavistas into publicly supporting her "findings," Golinger posted a series of articles on the pro-government on-line forum Aporrea.org., criticizing Chavistas for turning a blind eye to USG-sponsored exchange programs in Venezuela. In her articles Golinger repeatedly warns that the BRV is riddled with "infiltrators" that work to advance the "imperial agenda" and questioned Desiree Santos' "revolutionary" credentials.

¶12. (C) Separately, the local media reported that Golinger's Caracas apartment was broken into while she gave a televised interview. The opposition-oriented daily "Tal Cual" reported August 14, however, that Golinger fabricated the story to garner public sympathy. According to the daily, residents in Golinger's building denied that such burglary occurred.

Comment

¶13. (C) Golinger's renewed efforts to portray USG-sponsored exchange and funding opportunities as illegal and subversive activities largely failed. Golinger and company were apparently completely taken aback by the lack of support they received from Chavista circles. Moreover, the duo gravely miscalculated the opinion makers' response to their allegations. The fact that Chavistas have participated in the IV program likely fueled the backlash among Chavista supporters. The NA staffer who escorted Golinger and Silva to the NA Committee hearing, for example, had just returned from a two-week U.S. visit organized by PAS.

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¶14. (C) Nevertheless, Golinger and Silva's attempts to criminalize the IV program has taken its toll on former and prospective IV participants. Former participants have been subject to government harassment, while prospective candidates fear BRV retaliation for their participation. It is particularly hard to persuade Chavez supporters to participate in a program they perceived as potentially career-ending.

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